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Positioning Change Management and International Human Resource Management

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Abstract

This concept paper examines the positioning of Change Management (CM) in relation to IHRM, and suggests that the emerging field of CM should be seen as collaborative with HRM in providing for the dynamic needs of organisations in contemporary international conditions of uncertainty and environmental turbulence.

Introduction

IHRM has been accepted as a specialised area of research and practice for several decades. Comparative HRM, expatriate management, intercultural management, and related topics, are no longer fringe interests of the eccentric few or elective units in HRM degrees. For example, cross-cultural professional development of staff is a major budget item for many multinationals (Davidson & Stanley 2009). Indeed, the IHRM conference that has met every two years for the past 22 years is testament to the enduring relevance of the answers it provides to the questions posed by contemporary organisations and their management. For example, the use of project management methodologies in IHRM is increasingly being providing a theoretical and practical structure to much of the activities of HR professionals working in international HRM (Davidson, 2010). An example is in specialised tasks such as knowledge management (Davidson & Rowe, 2009).

The traditional role of HRM

Traditionally, HRM has seen itself as exercising a support function within the organisation, consulting to line management on such matters as strategy and workforce planning, along with functional tasks in relation to recruitment, selection, training and development, remuneration and compensation, and performance management (Davidson et al 2009).

The emergence of Change Management

More recently, the rapid rate of change in organisations' environments and the organisational requirement for its effective management have been met by

some HR professionals through the application of well-known models of change management (Becker & Davidson 2007).

While some have argued that change management falls logically in the area of responsibility of HRM, there is an apparent growth of Change management as a profession or subspecialty of management in its own right, providing consultative services to line management in much the same way as HRM does.

Courses in Change management are frequently offered at short course and tertiary level, and the first Australian vocational education program in Change Management commenced in 2010. Research in change management and journals reporting it are burgeoning, and allocation of formal job titles such as Change Manager and the formation of member bodies in industry are reflecting the emergence of what is effectively a new profession of Change Management.

Thus, emerging thinking about CM has it developing the skills, knowledge and behaviours to make and sustain change. The profession of Change Manager is developing through specialised training and qualifications, with assigned job titles that reflect the scope of the role in a project, program and organisational level.

The Australian vocational program teaches that the Change Manager is responsible for a project of change, with Change Officers and the Project Manager working collaboratively to bring about change. In this model, the Change Manager represents the interests of the organisation while the Project Manager is responsible for the project itself, in a customer - supplier relationship, delivering a required solution to the organisation. While the Project Manager remains accountable for the outcomes of the project, the Change Manager is accountable for achieving the benefits of the outcomes for the organisation, which frequently do not occur until after the project has terminated and the Project Manager has left the role. This new model, holds the organisation itself accountable for achieving the expected benefits through the organisation's traditional systems and structures

From this maturing of the change management role, it is possible that Change Management is probably now at a stage where Project Management was a few short decades ago, and HRM was only briefly before that.

Previously the province of consultants and the part-time duty of the organisation's HR manager, CM is rapidly developing as a specialisation that consults, advises, coordinates, and where appropriate, such as where the change is managed using project methodology, implements the change in what are frequently very complex change projects. In doing so it relies on research and theory from not only its own emerging field, but also from many of the same disciplines that HRM has benefitted from over many years: Organisational Behaviour, General Management, Project Management, in addition to particular contributions from systems theory, complexity theory,

individual and organisational psychology. Thus, there is some overlap, but the duties are different.

The development of the Change Management profession also provides the HRM professional with an additional career path that can evidence its contribution to the organisation's strategic outcomes, project by project.

CM, HRM and IHRM

What does this mean for the international HR manager? Is it a case of get on board or be left behind? The choice may not be quite so stark, but what seems clear is that in the international arena, there is more than ever the need for organisations to have well-developed and sophisticated capability to manage change. The demand for 'change competence' is increasingly recognised as normal and likely to be expanding. With people being both instigators and recipients of change, in domestic as well as international organisations, IHRM has always been in the midst of the debate and the implementation of change programmes. Certainly the role of HR professionals in providing strategic and operational consultancy within the organisation appears likely to continue, and in the international sphere this will continue to manifest in cross-cultural management and global projects. As projects become more complex and 'mega', the demands for managing organisational change will become even more challenging. IHRM will undoubtedly be a variable in this complex equation.

However, IHRM is not the only important expression of tactical management and this does have implications for all HRM professionals. Research provides significant evidence that the consultation, communication, and training processes are also required to support Change Leaders (Managers of Business Units) to take their people through change (Dean, 2010). The competent Change Manager's role is to co-ordinate these 'resources' to responsibly share the change management tasks across these management specialisations.

There is now a burgeoning body of knowledge and a new breed of qualified professionals with expertise in the management of change across and within organisations, who are differentiating themselves from HRM but who affirm the requirement to consult and cooperate across disciplines.

It is concluded that there is every reason for IHRM professionals to establish collaborative relationships with Change Management professionals, in the interests of organisational productivity and in support of the values that HRM has long espoused.

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